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SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 54th MEETING

Chairman: Mr. CISSÉ (Senegal)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.25 p.m.

AGENDA ITEM 97: ADVANCEMENT OF WOMEN (continued) (A/49/38, A/49/176, A/49/204-E/1994/90, A/49/205-E/1994/91, A/49/217-E/1994/103, A/49/287-S/1994/894 and Corr.1, A/49/308, A/49/314, A/49/327 and Corr.1, A/49/349, A/49/354, A/49/365-E/1994/119, A/49/378, A/49/381, A/49/462 and Corr.1, A/49/506, A/49/532 and A/49/587 and Corr.1; A/C.3/49/13 and A/C.3/49/26)

1. Mrs. RUIZ SANCHEZ DE VIELMAN (Guatemala), reviewing United Nations activities for women up to the convening of the Fourth World Conference on Women, said that the plan of action to be adopted at that Conference was of fundamental importance for the Governments of Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua and Panama, on whose behalf she spoke. The plan of action would indicate the ways in which Member States could continue, at the international level, to enhance the status of women.

2. Despite the huge obstacles, often secular in origin, that impeded its economic and social development, Central America had recently entered a phase characterized by democracy and a strengthening of the rule of law. Women in Central America had become equal to men before the law, and that had helped give them better access to education and vocational training, and hence to the enjoyment of their fundamental freedoms not only as human beings but also as citizens having all political and civil rights, both individual and collective. Those momentous changes had not, however, eliminated the functional and structural inequalities from which women still suffered in that region of the world. Accordingly, the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean, meeting in Mar del Plata in September 1994, had adopted a programme of action for women, which represented the region's contribution to the Beijing Conference and included the following six priorities: recognition of the cultural plurality of the region, elimination of poverty and social marginalization, women's equal participation in decision-making in the public and private sectors, women's equal participation in economic and social development, elimination of violence against women and full respect for their fundamental rights, and support and cooperation at the international level. Government measures in the Central American countries should also take into account the ethnic and cultural diversity of the region, together with the biological differences between men and women. Such measures should also focus not only on material comforts but also on sustainable development, social justice and democracy.

3. Women were the prime victims of the increase in poverty; women in rural areas and shantytowns, migrant workers, refugee and displaced women suffered particularly from poverty because of their low level of education and their extremely limited access to training and the means of production. In times of economic and political crisis, growing numbers of women were forced to support their families. Governments should therefore attach particular importance in their development policies to the role of women in production and improve services to allow them to realize their potential, particularly outside the home. That recommendation was particularly true for countries where women represented a greater proportion of the informal sector, which required minimal education. None the less, the Central American countries welcomed the trend

noted by the Secretary-General towards the growing feminization of all economic sectors. The Central American countries shared the Secretary-General's recognition of the need to expand women's access to the highest political and economic decision-making bodies as a way of combating poverty and eliminating discrimination against women.

4. Clear and significant progress had been made in the region in improving women's access to decision-making in the various sectors of social life. Increasing numbers of women were performing high-level official functions, particularly in Nicaragua, Costa Rica and Honduras. Educational efforts to promote mutual respect between men and women and to apply the provisions of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, to which many countries had not yet acceded, should be pursued. Continued support should also be given to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, and it should be provided with all the resources it needed to carry out its mandate.

5. With regard to full respect for the fundamental rights of women, the Central American countries renewed the commitments they had made in the declaration adopted at the Vienna World Conference on Human Rights, reaffirming the obligation to respect rights irrespective of gender. At the regional conference on human rights held in Costa Rica in January 1993, the Central American countries had expressed their concern at violence against women and, in January 1994, had participated in the adoption, under the auspices of the Organization of American States, of the Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence against Women.

6. The Central American countries were concerned about the unfavourable economic climate and its negative impact on political change in the region. They felt that international cooperation was essential in order to boost their economic development. They called on the international community to help the less developed countries solve their serious educational and health problems. They hoped that by its next session the Commission on the Status of Women would be able to reach a consensus on the final document to be adopted at the Beijing Conference and were prepared to offer support in that regard, in accordance with the commitment to promote the status of women which their heads of State had recently reaffirmed at the presidential summit held in Guácimo, Costa Rica.

7. Mr. MAYRHOFER-GRUENBUEHEL (Austria) said that Austria supported the statement made by the representative of Germany on behalf of the European Union. In particular, it shared the European Union's views on the need to strengthen the effectiveness of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), on the problems posed by some of the reservations made to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and on the preparations for the Fourth World Conference on Women.

8. With regard to those preparations, Austria was interested in seeing the process move forward as much as possible, especially as Austria was one of the Vice-Chairmen of the Commission on the Status of Women. Austria had recently welcomed a regional preparatory conference in Vienna for the Beijing Conference organized by the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE), at which 44 members of the Commission and many United Nations organizations were represented. That

regional conference had been preceded by a forum of non-governmental organizations, which had brought to Vienna representatives of 1,700 organizations from all the ECE countries, including the countries in transition, and Austria had made special efforts to facilitate their participation in the forum. The forum had adopted a strong document entitled "Vienna NGO Forum 94: Call for Action".

9. The regional preparatory conference had established a dialogue on the advancement of women, particularly with the countries in transition, and had adopted a regional platform for action which would not only provide input to the global platform for action but was also designed for direct implementation in the ECE region. Some elements of the platform were of particular relevance, namely, the premise that women's rights were human rights and that equality and partnership between women and men required a more equitable sharing of economic and political power; the proposal that an individual right of petition be introduced in the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, which would have to be examined by the Commission on the Status of Women and by the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women; the need for structural adjustment programmes to take into account the specific effects they might have on women; the proposal that men and women should be free to choose between full employment and part-time employment and to benefit from protection regarding employment and social security; lastly, the responsibility of men to help women with the household work and in caring for children and the elderly within the family.

10. With regard to the follow-up to the regional conference, the platform for action contained several important recommendations. It, inter alia, invited ECE to consider at its next regular session the creation of implementation and monitoring mechanisms. It called for the establishment of an international centre for NGOs from countries in transition with a view to helping those NGOs in the start-up process, and it also called for an estimate of the cost of a core programme for women's empowerment. Finally, the Vienna preparatory conference had also recalled that the ECE region had major responsibilities towards the developing countries inasmuch as many donor countries were in that region.

11. He welcomed the decision taken by the Secretary-General of the World Conference on Women, Mrs. Mongella, to focus during the next few days on those parts of the draft platform for action which were as yet least developed, namely, section V (Financial Arrangements) and section VI (Institutional Arrangements). He also strongly supported the points she had made concerning the follow-up to the World Conference. He agreed that, unless institutions, both national and international, were put into an implementation mode, there would be no follow-up.

12. Finally, he recalled that women's issues cut across practically the entire agenda of the Second and Third Committees, and even those of the other Committees of the General Assembly, and that dealing with women's issues, in fact, meant dealing with all the vital issues that confronted humanity at the present time.

13. Mrs. DION (Canada) said that the International Conference on Population and Development, which had resulted in action-oriented commitments in key areas, such as women's empowerment, education and health, all issues which were central to the advancement of women, had further reinforced the interest that Canadians took in the advancement of women. The upcoming World Summit for Social Development would continue the discussion on social integration, poverty alleviation and employment which were also important areas to women.

14. Her delegation commended the initiatives outlined in the report of the High Commissioner for Human Rights which were designed to integrate the human rights of women into the mainstream of the activities and programmes of the Centre for Human Rights and welcomed the interest he had expressed in contributing to the Fourth World Conference on Women. It was also pleased with the recommendation of the chairpersons of the human rights treaty bodies that in 1995 one meeting should be devoted to examining ways of more effectively monitoring the human rights of women, and their suggestion that reporting guidelines should be amended and that States should be asked to include in their reports information on the situation of women and that the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women should be strengthened. Her delegation welcomed the adoption by the General Assembly of the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women and the appointment of a Special Rapporteur of the Commission on Human Rights on that issue; it fully supported the work of the Special Rapporteur and urged all States to respond promptly to the latter's requests for information and to cooperate in any inquiries that the Special Rapporteur might undertake in the future.

15. Her delegation believed that the Fourth World Conference on Women had the potential to act as a catalyst for progress on women's equality around the world, and it looked forward to the Conference as a forum in which United Nations institutional reform for the effective implementation of women's rights might be examined.

16. In Canada the preparatory process had been launched in collaboration with a broad range of organizations, interests and individuals. A nationwide programme of information and communication based on the theme "creating a world of equality" had been undertaken. Canada recognized and fully supported the growing participation of non-governmental organizations in international conferences and noted that the NGO forums associated with intergovernmental conferences were becoming more closely linked with the issues discussed at such conferences. Canada attached great importance to the national report which it would submit to the World Conference. The report would be a contribution to the consideration on the state of the world's women and a useful vehicle for reviewing what had been accomplished in Canada since 1985 and what remained to be done. Canada looked forward to hosting, early in 1995, an international symposium on women and the media which was being organized by UNESCO in the context of the preparatory activities for the World Conference.

17. Canada had been pleased to participate in the regional preparatory meeting of the Economic Commission for Europe. In its platform for action, ECE accorded great attention to women's rights as human rights and reflected relevant decisions concerning women's reproductive and sexual health and reproductive rights taken at the International Conference on Population and Development. The

platform for action together with the documents from the other regional preparatory meetings would be a valuable contribution to the development of a global platform for action; her delegation urged the Secretariat to integrate the results of those meetings into the draft platform. It looked forward to receiving that draft well in advance of the next session of the Commission on the Status of Women, so that the necessary domestic consultations could take place, but at the same time cautioned against trying to prepare too ambitious a document. The message of the World Conference must be transmitted to all women; that was the responsibility not just of Governments but of society as a whole.

18. Mr. THANARAJASINGAM (Malaysia) said that education, training and an appreciation of women's rights were central to efforts for the advancement of women; society as a whole needed to be educated. The equality of women must be promoted, especially in the economic sphere, and the unique and undeniable contribution that women made in that area must be acknowledged. Affirmative action, both nationally and internationally, to promote the participation of women in all economic activities, especially at the decision-making level, should continue so that women could enjoy the benefits of the development process and exercise some control over their lives.

19. The promotion and advancement of women were particularly important in rural areas. Every effort should be made to promote the social and economic advancement of rural women in the context of national development plans. As one of the main initiators of the Summit on the Economic Advancement of Rural Women, held in Geneva in 1992, Malaysia was continuing its efforts in that area. It hoped that the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing would provide an opportunity for reviewing all the problems that women faced and boosting international action in their favour.

20. The Platform for Action to be adopted at the Conference should not be a repeat of the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies but should identify the obstacles to their implementation and recommend ways and means of achieving their goals by the year 2000. The Platform for Action should address the root causes of the problems identified, reflect women's perspectives and provide indicators for women's participation in seeking solutions to those problems. It should also focus on the economic, social and political advancement of women and put special emphasis on the eradication of poverty and illiteracy. Illiteracy excluded women from productive employment and affected their quality of life. It was crucial to accord high priority to the attainment of functional literacy for all by the year 2000. Steps must also be taken to ensure equal access by women and men to science and technology, so as to change gender-stereotyped notions about scientific and technical expertise being the exclusive domain of men.

21. Her delegation viewed with deep concern the proliferation of armed conflicts, which caused millions of people, especially women and children, to become refugees and displaced persons. Being particularly vulnerable, women and children were exposed to atrocities such as torture, rape, harassment and gross violations of their human rights; the United Nations had an important role to play in ensuring their security and welfare. In that regard, it should be borne in mind that women too could contribute to disarmament.

22. Her delegation welcomed the efforts of UNIFEM to help women gain the skills necessary to move into decision-making positions and the efforts of INSTRAW to integrate women into the policy-making process. Those efforts had served to promote the inclusion of women in trade and industry, national development planning and environmental protection. Her delegation fully supported that comprehensive approach to the advancement of women. Concerning the proposed merger of INSTRAW and UNIFEM, her delegation, like the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions, felt that further studies were necessary before taking a final decision on the issue. The problem of the relocation of staff and the loss of employment of local staff in the event of a merger must be addressed. Broad-based consultations should be held and the net result should be that efforts to promote the advancement of women were strengthened, coordinated and efficient.

23. Malaysia was concerned at the increasing incidence of all forms of violence against women, which violated their human rights. It was particularly outraged by the inhuman practice of the Serbs in Bosnia and Herzegovina of using the rape of women as a weapon of war. The perpetrators of those atrocities must be brought to justice and the international community must send a clear message that violence against women would not be condoned or tolerated. The endorsement of the United Nations Declaration on Elimination of Violence against Women was a step in the right direction.

24. Concerning the report of the Secretary-General on the improvement of the status of women in the Secretariat (A/49/587), there had been only a marginal increase in the overall representation of women in the Secretariat. The Secretary-General should therefore be encouraged to pursue his efforts to reach the overall target of 35 per cent for women in posts subject to geographical distribution by 1995.

25. Ms. TOMIČ (Slovenia) said that it was encouraging to note that preparations for the Fourth World Conference on Women were well under way at all levels. Slovenia had participated actively in the High-level Regional Preparatory Meeting organized by the Economic Commission for Europe and had supported the final document adopted by the Meeting.

26. It was of primary importance that each State take a critical look at the situation of women in its own territory, and she would therefore use the current opportunity to review the situation of women in Slovenia. In the past decade, the Republic of Slovenia had experienced major economic and socio-political changes, throughout which women had played an active role, organizing themselves to defend women's issues both within and outside political parties. That movement had led to the establishment in 1990 of a Parliamentary Committee for Women's Politics and in 1992 of a government office for women's politics, both of which were responsible for enhancing the status of women. Moreover, since its independence, Slovenia had made a point of ensuring that Slovenian women enjoyed the rights guaranteed under the principal international human rights instruments. A post of guardian for human rights and fundamental freedoms (ombudsman) had been established and Slovenia had acceded to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. Currently, de jure equality between men and women could be said to exist in Slovenia. The situation in Slovenia concerning de facto equality was the same as in many other

countries, in that men had more opportunities than women. For instance, Slovenian women had less access to land, capital and other means of production than Slovenian men and thus had fewer opportunities to wield influence or economic and political power. Slovenian women had also been affected by the sharp increase in unemployment in recent years. As a result, one of the priorities of Slovenian society was to give women the same opportunities as men by securing their equal representation in positions of economic and political decision-making and equal access to education at all levels.

27. Her delegation attached particular importance to the issue of violence against women and welcomed the appointment of Ms. Radhika Coomaraswamy as Special Rapporteur on that question. Although the question of violence against women was no longer taboo in Slovenia, the situation in that regard was far from satisfactory. In particular, there was a lack of appropriate services specialized in aiding victims. Government services were insufficiently sensitive to cases of violence and often failed to assist those affected. Her delegation hoped that the recommendations of the Special Rapporteur would offer some guidance in that respect.

28. The Fourth World Conference on Women would afford an opportunity to assess changes with regard to women's issues over the past decade not only world wide but also, and most importantly, at the national level. Slovenia had prepared its national report with that object in mind.

29. Ms. ANDAYANI (Indonesia) said that, in the decade since the Nairobi Conference, the global situation had changed completely. While women had experienced tremendous opportunities, they had also been confronted by serious challenges. It was imperative that the international community adopt action-oriented measures in favour of women, who continued to suffer various forms of discrimination and violence. The World Conference on Human Rights had expressed concern at that situation and had stated that the human rights of women should form an integral part of United Nations human rights activities.

30. Equality for women was not only a human right but was founded in economic reality. Women played a central role in production and had a valuable contribution to make to policy-making and the planning of national economic policy. As indicated in document A/49/349 on the implementation of the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies, women still had not attained anything near equality with men in top-level posts. Her delegation therefore welcomed the decision of the Commission on the Status of Women to give priority at its 1995 session to the issue of women and economic decision-making. Gender bias against women in employment, training and promotion must be removed and particular emphasis must be placed on education, for knowledge was the first step to empowerment. Women must be made aware of their legal rights and her Government was taking action in that regard. It was also trying to increase legal support services for poor women and their families. However, her Government recognized that education alone was not sufficient and that attitudes and behaviours which had created structural discrimination against women must be overcome.

31. Indonesia had signed the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women in July 1980 and had ratified it in 1984. Her delegation attached great importance to that instrument and was concerned that

its effectiveness was being threatened. The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women did not have sufficient time to consider the reports submitted by States parties and to establish a constructive dialogue with them. Measures must be taken to remedy that situation.

32. The Second Asian and Pacific Ministerial Conference on Women in Development had been held at Jakarta under the auspices of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP). The Conference had noted that the region's impressive economic growth had not been matched by an equal performance in enhancing the status of women and that the eradication of poverty was fundamental in that regard. The World Summit for Social Development should consider that question from a gender perspective, especially in view of the feminization of poverty. Many delegations at the Conference had noted that while there had been an increase in the participation of women in employment in their countries, many of those women were in low-paying, low-skilled jobs. The Conference had also noted the need to emphasize greater sharing of family responsibilities. The Jakarta Declaration for the Advancement of Women in Asia and the Pacific, adopted at the Conference, stated that women must be fully integrated into policy formulation and implementation and should be given equal opportunities in all fields through greater educational opportunities, and that priority should be given to health programmes targeting women throughout the life cycle. The Declaration also stressed the need to eradicate absolute poverty, strengthen national machinery for the advancement of women and eliminate violence against women in the family, society and conflict situations.

33. Concerning the proposed merger of the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW) and the United Nations Trust Fund for Women (UNIFEM), her delegation had read with particular interest the suggestions made in that regard by the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions (ACABQ) in its report (A/49/365) and hoped that the points raised therein would be addressed.

34. Mr. HAAKONSEN (Denmark) said that he was speaking on behalf of the Nordic countries, namely, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden and his own country.

35. The Nordic countries believed that women had a positive influence on the economic development of their societies. That belief was underscored by the 1994 World Survey on the Role of Women in Development (A/49/378) and could serve as a point of departure for discussions in the Third Committee and at the forthcoming session of the Commission on the Status of Women.

36. All the regional preparatory conferences for the Fourth World Conference on Women had now been held and the Committee had before it five final regional documents. It was necessary to identify the common elements of those documents to make sure that they were reflected in the Beijing Platform for Action.

37. The High-level Regional Preparatory Meeting for the European region had focused on the following issues: women's human rights, equal sharing of economic and political power, economic independence of women, reconciliation between working life and family life, the role of men as equal partners in the home, reproductive rights and reproductive health, and the integration of gender equality into all areas of policy-making and implementation. The Nordic

Forum 94, held at Turku, Finland, had also considered those issues and the Nordic countries would work to promote them at Beijing. They also hoped that the question of mobilizing resources for future action on those issues would be put on the agenda of the March 1995 session of the Commission on the Status of Women.

38. It was regrettable that the background documents for the holding of informal consultations on the draft Platform for Action of the Beijing Conference had been issued late to Member States, meaning that the Secretariat's recommendations, including the important recommendations on arrangements for the implementation and monitoring of the Platform for Action, could only now begin to be considered. The question of implementation was crucial. Closer cooperation must be established between the various women-specific programmes and institutions of the United Nations system and resources must be consolidated to enhance the effectiveness of activities in that area. In that regard, it was unfortunate that the proposal by the Secretary-General to merge INSTRAW and UNIFEM had led to a great deal of confusion and, possibly, to a slow-down of INSTRAW activities.

39. On the issue of women's human rights, the Nordic countries attached great importance to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, which had been ratified by 134 countries and was the subject of periodic reports. However, they wondered whether the Convention was sufficiently effective to safeguard individual women against gender discrimination. In that regard, they drew attention to the proposal in the European regional platform for action calling for an optional protocol to the Convention that would introduce the right to individual petition in cases of gender discrimination. That right could be formulated in accordance with practice in other human rights instruments.

40. The Nordic countries also endorsed the European recommendation that the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) should have adequate meeting time and the necessary resources to perform its functions. As the report of the Secretary-General (A/49/308) showed, the reporting situation was deplorable. Currently, it could take up to five years from the time a country submitted a report until that report was considered by the Committee. New measures needed to be taken, which might include considering a country's second and third reports or third and fourth reports at the same session.

41. It was also very important that countries which had made reservations to the Convention should consider withdrawing them. States parties should also review their national legislation to make it compatible with the Convention.

42. With regard to women's human rights, he reiterated the Nordic countries' wholehearted support for all efforts to eliminate gender-specific violence. Those countries welcomed the appointment of a Special Rapporteur on violence against women and believed that the heinous crimes committed against women in the former Yugoslavia must be prosecuted by the International Tribunal established for that purpose.

43. The Nordic countries welcomed the Programme of Action adopted at the International Conference on Population and Development, held in Cairo, and

endorsed the main elements of that Programme, especially the emphasis on education, health, empowerment of women, sustained economic growth and the environment. All those elements, together with recognition of the importance of women's reproductive rights and the need to facilitate the access of girls and women to education and employment, were a major step forward. The consensus on those issues opened up new perspectives for the forthcoming World Summit for Social Development, which his Government was to host in March 1995 at Copenhagen. The main themes of the Summit, namely, eradication of poverty, expansion of productive employment and social integration were of vital importance to women. The Nordic countries believed that a gender perspective should be incorporated in both the Declaration and the Programme of Action to be adopted at the Summit.

44. Mr. KULYK (Ukraine) said that by approaching women's basic rights as an integral part of universal human rights, the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action cast the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women in a new light. In order to raise public awareness about that new approach, it was important to wage a systematic information campaign on all aspects of women's rights, particularly in the countries in transition where there was a rebirth of paternalistic attitudes towards the role of women in society.

45. Ukraine supported efforts aimed at integrating equal status for women into the mainstream of United Nations system-wide activities, in particular the recommendation by the Commission on the Status of Women that cooperation between the Centre for Human Rights and the Division for the Advancement of Women should be developed.

46. In the context of the forthcoming World Conference on Women, an Organizational Committee headed by the Deputy Prime Minister had been established in Ukraine in early 1993. It brought together representatives from different ministries, heads of research institutes and leaders of non-governmental organizations dealing with women's affairs. The Organizational Committee was working closely with the Parliamentary Commission on Human Rights. Under its supervision, a plan of action had been elaborated for the period 1993-1995, the priorities of which were dictated by the current economic situation in Ukraine. The plan envisaged the holding of a number of conferences in Ukraine. In view of the deterioration of the demographic situation in Ukraine, it had been decided on the Committee's initiative to create a national centre for family planning. It was also planned to review the national programme for the advancement of women that had been adopted in 1992; the programme's aim was to improve the working conditions and guarantee the social protection of women, and it contained a number of pragmatic measures designed to offer women the choice of taking up a full- or part-time job or staying at home. However, the programme had been widely criticized by women's organizations for its lack of realism, and its implementation had been hampered by the economic situation; it therefore needed to be reconsidered.

47. Lastly, his delegation welcomed the programme for women that was being implemented by the United Nations Development Programme in Ukraine. The two-year programme would help to develop innovative gender-sensitive policies which would take into account the specific role of women and the major impact that the transition period would have on their situation.

48. Mr. COLOMA (Chile) said that his Government was deeply concerned by the problem of violence against women, which constituted a violation of the fundamental rights of women, perpetuated the inequalities that existed between men and women and restricted the latter's involvement in the development of society. Moreover, such violence was often committed within the family, which was even more serious because the family was one of the pillars of society and transmitted values and behavioural models. Violence against women encroached not only on their civil and political rights, but also on their economic, social and cultural rights and was detrimental to society as a whole. The problems it raised were intricate and could not be resolved quickly. Their solution required Governments to act in conjunction with various actors in the international community and civil society. In Chile, for example, it was clear that non-governmental organizations were irreplaceable when it came to reaching the marginalized sectors of society.

49. His delegation endorsed the appointment by the Commission on Human Rights of a Special Rapporteur on that issue and the adoption by the States members of the Organization of American States of an Inter-American Convention for the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence against Women.

50. Ms. KUMAR (India) said that implementing the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action did not simply mean combating violence against women, it also meant promoting women's access to literacy, employment, empowerment and decision-making. In that respect, it was essential for more States to ratify the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women because discrimination, when buttressed by law, was an infringement of women's fundamental rights. It was also necessary to put in place mechanisms to combat overt and covert forms of discrimination in the workplace, sexual harassment and exploitation and gender bias in employment, education and remuneration for work.

51. Her delegation welcomed the appointment of Ms. Radhika Coomaraswamy (Sri Lanka) as Special Rapporteur for Violence against women. India was proud to belong to the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation, which had made the advancement of women and girls one of its major objectives.

52. The Indian Constitution prohibited any discrimination on the grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth. Two constitutional amendments adopted in 1992 reserved one third of the seats on village municipal councils and various local political organs for women. The perspective national plan for women adopted by the Indian Government included a series of recommendations on political participation, credit for private enterprises, land and property ownership, legal matters, support services, education and health. The National Commission for Women, established by federal law, was composed of representatives of women's organizations, the media, the legal profession and academia. Its tasks included reviewing federal and state laws relating to women, considering complaints and working closely with international organizations in order to improve the status of women. The Government had also adopted a National Action Plan centred around the survival, protection and development of young girls.

53. The growth of non-governmental women's organizations in India had been nothing short of spectacular; they had firmly established themselves in and were

working closely with the federal and state governments, and were equally active in rural and urban areas. The women's movement in rural India dated back to the turn of the century and the Charter of Rights for Women had been adopted in 1946, even before India attained independence. Women's organizations were currently actively campaigning for the economic betterment, employment, fundamental rights, literacy and security of women, as well as improvements in the cultural and environmental fields. Those organizations were playing a particularly useful role in the implementation of government programmes for young girls.

54. Her delegation believed it was necessary to study the successes and failures of women in developing countries, because they represented 80 per cent of the world's female population. In India, women who had been able to take part in economic decision-making had made notable progress. Development programmes had yielded better results when women had been involved in their conception and implementation.

55. Education was another liberating factor. In the Delhi Declaration of 16 December 1993, the leaders of the nine most populous developing countries reaffirmed their commitment to education for all. They recognized that the education and empowerment of girls and women was a major objective and essential component of the social development, well-being and education of present and future generations. There was a need to increase the number of training and research centres in developing countries to study the problems affecting women in those societies and thereby enable United Nations agencies to provide more effective assistance to the Governments of those countries.

56. The experiences of some countries could prove useful to others. The measures that had been taken in India to bring women into elected offices at local level had been successful and could be applied in other countries. It should also not be forgotten that 80 per cent of the world's refugees were women and children.

57. It was imperative that the Fourth World Conference on Women should not only present a united front but should also adopt progressive, innovative and far-reaching standards for both Governments and their peoples. Her delegation would pursue its work in that spirit during the preparatory work for the Conference and during the Conference itself. It restated its support for Ms. Mongella, the Secretary-General of the Conference, and her secretariat. It noted with satisfaction that, as the results of the regional conferences had shown, the issues agitating women were the same everywhere; it would therefore be easier to achieve action-orientated consensus on the main concerns of the world's women. Her delegation intended to work with non-governmental organizations and United Nations specialized agencies to achieve common goals.

58. Mr. LINDGREN ALVES (Brazil) said that Mrs. Mongella had had the opportunity, during her visit to Brazil in June 1994, to acquaint herself with the preparatory activities under way for the World Conference. A National Committee representing the various sectors of Brazilian society had been established and had recently submitted its report to the United Nations.

59. The women's struggle in Brazil had gained special impetus in the 1980s, the period during which Brazil's new Constitution had been promulgated. That Constitution was fully in line with the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and enshrined many of the recommendations of the Nairobi Strategies. In particular, the Constitution had instituted paternity leave, provided for family planning in public health services, increased the number of day-care nurseries and kindergartens, facilitated women's access to the labour market, given women prisoners the right to care for their babies, prohibited discrimination, established equality between the sexes, recognized the right of rural and domestic workers to social assistance and required the State to establish mechanisms to counter violence within the family. One of the most auspicious trends in Brazil was the growing number of women in executive and legislative positions at all levels.

60. Despite those important gains, the progressive deterioration of the international economic situation had been felt particularly by women. It was for that reason that the Latin American and Caribbean Regional Preparatory Meeting for the Beijing Conference, held at Mar del Plata, Argentina, had recognized the absolute necessity of improving women's quality of life, especially in the areas of health and education, and had acknowledged the importance of international cooperation to that end. The Regional Plan of Action for the period 1995-2000, adopted at Mar del Plata, set out actions that each Government in the region must implement in order to improve women's status. However, it would not be possible to take those measures unless the Beijing Platform for Action established the necessary financial and institutional arrangements.

61. He wished to put on record the invaluable support which UNIFEM had given to Brazil's efforts to raise women's awareness of their rights, particularly their legal rights, and to develop a dialogue on that issue with women's movements. Women's rights had been strongly affirmed at the International Conference on Population and Development, held recently at Cairo. Brazil expected that the Beijing Conference would be equally important for the world, and still more significant for the cause of women. It believed that the success of the Conference would be closely linked to the ability to develop tightly focused strategies, and to how those strategies were implemented after Beijing. It would be inappropriate to go to Beijing with wish lists, as had been the case at the Regional Conference at Mar del Plata. Instead, a framework should be sought which would make it possible to deal comprehensively with clusters of issues.

62. Archbishop MARTINO (Observer for the Holy See) said that of the three main themes of the Fourth World Conference on Women - Equality, Development and Peace - peace was the one to which the Holy See gave priority.

63. With reference to equality, Pope John Paul II had clarified that concept when he had spoken of "equality in diversity", saying that women should be equal with men, while remaining different. That difference was apparent primarily in the family, where the woman undertook the unique role of wife and mother. Because that role was irreplaceable, the authorities should ensure that women's professional activity did not detract from their vocation as mothers and educators. The social value of the work done by women within the family should be recognized, including by legislative measures, and that work should be

included in national labour accounting systems. Governments could also encourage flexible work schedules for parents, as well as the reintegration of older women into the workforce.

64. The safeguarding of women in the family also required measures to address domestic violence. The family should be a place of security and self-fulfilment for every one of its members. The need for public education in that regard was evident, and such education should be provided not only to women, but also to men.

65. It was also important to ensure that women, particularly rural women, were provided with essential social services, including education and health care. Humanitarian agencies of the Catholic Church were also well aware of the impact of development assistance on women, even when it was on a very modest scale, such as the digging of a water well.

66. On a global scale, the role of the media was extremely important. The media should be encouraged to promote positive images of women and of gender relations. The media industry must be held accountable for the content of the programmes it transmitted, particularly when they were transmitted to very diverse audiences. Currently, many communities had little influence over what was broadcast, and no control over the broadcasting of pornography or the depiction of violence. It was not a question of restricting freedom of expression or information, but of calling upon those who owned and operated the media to observe an international code of ethics which would include a commitment to promoting and protecting women's dignity and rights.

67. Women's well-being had material, psychological and social aspects, but also a spiritual and religious dimension. The Holy See found it disturbing that efforts had been made recently in various international forums to avoid or delete any positive reference to religion or spirituality in relation to women. Just because acts of violence were being perpetrated against women in the name of religion did not mean that the religious beliefs which were an important aspect of many women's lives, and should be respected as such, should be neglected.

68. The Holy See was concerned about women refugees and displaced persons, who were often responsible for their families' welfare, and about the suffering endured, particularly by women and children, as a result of internationally imposed sanctions. It was women and children who suffered most from economic sanctions, even though they were not to blame for the conflict which had prompted them.

69. Lastly, every possible measure should be taken to protect the most vulnerable groups, particularly women, in conflict situations. There again, however, the only real solution, as he had said at the beginning of his statement, was peace.

70. Mr. KHRYSKOV (Russian Federation) said that his country welcomed the extensive preparations being made for the Fourth World Conference on Women, in particular, the results of the work of the thirty-eighth session of the Commission on the Status of Women. The nine months remaining until the World

Conference should be used to examine the underlying reasons for discrimination against women and to work out a draft final document which was short, precise and concrete. The establishment of an open-ended working group to prepare that final document or draft Platform for Action was an excellent idea.

71. The Second Asian and Pacific Ministerial Conference, held at Jakarta in June 1994, had taken decisions on women's participation in development which his delegation considered extremely important. He noted with satisfaction that both that Conference and the European Regional Preparatory Meeting held at Vienna had adopted final documents which took into account the problems of women in the countries in transition. The content of those documents should be taken into account in preparing the draft Platform for Action of the World Conference.

72. His Government felt that the recommendations formulated during the preparations for the Fourth World Conference on Women should be of a practical nature and pay particular attention to the following issues: women's participation in decision-making and political life; the role of women in the cooperative movement; women's participation in the management of associations; women's role in government; women's participation in economic decision-making; and the activities of women's organizations.

73. In the context of its preparations for the World Conference, his Government had created a National Council which was responsible for drafting a report for the Conference and transmitting it to the United Nations Secretariat. The Council was currently considering the possibility of adopting legislation to give effect to the United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women.

74. Problems relating to the status of women were particularly relevant in his country at the present time. In October 1993, a political movement calling itself "Women of Russia" had been created. One of its aims was to strengthen the role of women in the social and political fields and to increase the number of women candidates for election to government bodies. Thanks to that movement, there were currently 69 women in the Congress of the Russian Federation, amounting to 11.4 per cent of all deputies. However, adequate participation of women in representative bodies, whether on the federal or the local level, was a problem which was still far from being solved. Overcoming that problem would, in particular, require abandoning many stereotypes inherited from the past.

75. If there was one area in which the situation of women in his country was particularly in need of improvement, it was employment. Women accounted for 70 per cent of unemployed persons in the Russian Federation, a problem made all the more serious by the fact that one woman in five was her family's sole breadwinner. There was also the problem of refugees, 53 per cent of whom were women.

76. Faced with that situation, his Government had undertaken, inter alia, to strengthen the national machinery responsible for improving the situation of women and to provide it with the necessary financial and human resources; to create a legislative framework favourable to women; to improve women's situation on the labour market and to eliminate discrimination in that area; to facilitate women's access to training; and to support the initiatives taken by women's

organizations. It was no coincidence that the Women's Congress, held recently in the context of the International Year of the Family and of preparations for the Fourth World Conference on Women, had taken as its theme "Work, employment and unemployment". At the Congress, the President of the Russian Federation, Mr. Boris Yeltsin, had announced the drafting of a decree providing additional assistance for women with children. His Government believed that problems related to children and the family could not be examined in isolation from those related to the status of women; all those problems were connected.

77. Mr. SY (Observer for the Organization of African Unity (OAU)) recalled that in the Lagos Plan of Action for the Economic Development of Africa, adopted in 1990, the Assembly of Heads of State and Government of OAU had stated that the problems of women could not be dealt with separately from the question of overall development. The Plan of Action had therefore emphasized, inter alia, education and training, employment, the media, health, nutrition and family life. However, the economic crisis which had affected most African countries in the 1980s had led to a sharp deterioration in the social and economic status of African women, a situation that had been compounded by drought, civil strife and rapid population growth. As a result, the gains made by women in the past 30 years had been seriously eroded, if not reversed. The United Nations estimated that by 1995, some 260 million Africans living in poverty would be women. That situation was all the more unacceptable since women constituted over 50 per cent of the African population, and more than 25 per cent of households in many African countries were headed by women.

78. Unfortunately, women in Africa had traditionally been accorded a low status, as reflected in many customs and cultural practices, and very few women were appointed to senior positions. Education and training opportunities for women were extremely limited, and that was one of the main aspects of discrimination against women, as pointed out by the Pan-African Conference on the Education of the Girl Child held at Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, in late March 1993. It was essential that the African States accelerate the integration of women in the development process and give them greater access to education and training. That necessity was recognized in numerous instruments adopted in Africa, such as the Lagos Plan of Action, the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women, the Abuja Declaration on Participatory Development: the Role of Women in Africa in the 1990s, and the Treaty Establishing the African Economic Community, and at the global level in the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. OAU was working to increase awareness among policy-makers in Africa of the need to give women the means to make an effective contribution to development. The OAU Labour Commission played a crucial role in that respect. During the sixteenth session of the Commission, the OAU secretariat had adopted guidelines for improving women's work in the informal sector.

79. In November 1989, the OAU secretariat had found it necessary to establish a Women's Focal Point to work towards the full integration of women's concerns into the Organization's activities, policies and programmes. Generally speaking, the long-term goal of OAU was to encourage member States to implement policies ensuring equal access for women to decision-making bodies and to adopt measures for the implementation of existing agreements from a gender

perspective. It was in that spirit that in August 1993, OAU had held a regional conference on women, peace and development in Kampala, Uganda.

80. The pivotal role of women in development had been given special emphasis in the Treaty Establishing the African Economic Community. Member States had agreed to take steps to improve the economic, social and cultural conditions of African women in order to integrate them more fully in development activities within the Community.

81. The African regional preparatory meeting for the Fourth World Conference on Women, held at Dakar under OAU auspices, had drafted a Platform for Action which emphasized the integration of a gender perspective in implementation programmes, the ratification of all conventions on women's rights and the provision of national legal frameworks for the implementation of the Platform and the mobilization of resources. The Dakar Platform would be submitted to the next OAU summit meeting for endorsement.

The meeting rose at 6.05 p.m.